

# readers' letters:

## What is 'a Christian practice'?

*Brixham GP Richard Montgomery asks: What is an appropriate understanding of a sense of mission in primary health care?*

For the last three years I have been a partner in a Christian practice in a small town on the South Devon coast. During this time I have been struggling with the whole idea of what 'a Christian practice' means. I used to be a partner in a conventional practice in urban Nottingham, and certainly this partnership is different from my previous one, but I would be interested in hearing from readers as to what they feel a Christian practice should or should not be doing.

In the past there have been a number of models of Christian group practice. When I lived in the East End of London, where I was a medical student, I knew more than one doctor who worked in the Bethnal Green Medical Mission. That is clearly a very public upfront statement of what was trying to be achieved through that institution.

My current practice has had a long tradition also of being upfront about its Christian stance. At the time, this facilitated clear involvement in *Mission England*, with good results. In the past the practice has also held publicly to a particular moral and ethical position over contraception and abortion, although for various reasons this has relaxed in more recent years.

So in the previous generation, this practice's understanding of its sense of mission has been typified by activity in the areas of evangelism and morality. The question is, is this appropriate these days? What does it mean in this generation to be involved in a Christian practice?

I would be very interested to hear from readers. What 'Christian' things are being done in other similar practices around the country? I would be interested in provoking debate over this either in *Triple Helix* or by direct correspondence. If there was a lot of interest, I wouldn't mind co-ordinating some kind of seminar or workshop to consider the issue.

## Clinical competence

*A recent case made retired consultant radiologist John Bergin from Cirencester ask some challenging questions about the Christian response to issues of competence:*

Most people will have read of the gynaecologist struck off the Register for what amounted to professional incompetence. Sadly there have been other similar cases. Do such examples raise issues which Christians in the health professions and the law ought to address? This particular case raises at least three issues:

1. How did an incompetent surgeon get appointed to a consultant post in the first place? I have sat on many advisory appointment committees over the years. Most of those appointed have proved capable and conscientious, but there have been mistakes. There are times when referees are more enthusiastic than accurate. As one cynic put it: 'some folk are glad to throw their dead cats over

the wall'! How careful we should be both in giving and assessing references.

2. Not a few patients had suffered over the years from this surgeon's ministrations. Had none of the GPs who referred cases to him noticed that all was not well? Did they go on sending him cases?

3. This case like many others took years to come to light. Whatever the justifications for such delay (and I have heard many), 'justice delayed is justice denied' and this applies not only to the patient but also to the doctor involved. The medical profession is expected to reach what may be life and death decisions immediately. How can such legal delays be regarded as acceptable?

Are these not ethical problems which we as Christians should actively address?

## Abortion Act 'Conscience Clause'

*Philippa Taylor writes from CARE, Christian Action Research & Education:*

On behalf of the all-party Parliamentary pro-life group, CARE is carrying out some research into the operation of the Abortion Act 'Conscience Clause'. We are trying to obtain information on any cases of doctors or other healthcare personnel including nursing staff, ancillary workers or administrative staff who have had problems with the workings of this clause. For example, it may have failed to provide adequate protection or it may have been ignored.

If you have any information that may be useful, please write to: Philippa Taylor, CARE, 53 Romney Street, London SW1P 3RF  
e-mail: [publicpolicy@care.org.uk](mailto:publicpolicy@care.org.uk)

## Conference for Nurses

*Jane Grier, a staff nurse in London and former UCCF relay worker with nursing students, announces a day conference:*

On Saturday June 19th from 10.30-4.30 there will be a day conference in central London for qualified nurses. Titled 'The Gospel Challenge', there will be Bible teaching focusing on the urgency of the gospel and how the New Age is affecting nursing.

For a booking form please contact:

Jane Grier: 0411 506697

Jane Davies: 0117 983 8228

The Editor welcomes original letters for consideration for publication. They should have both Christian and healthcare content, should not normally exceed 400 words, and if accepted may have to be edited for length.

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